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Impact of Bill 2 & Bill C-12 on Parc-Ex



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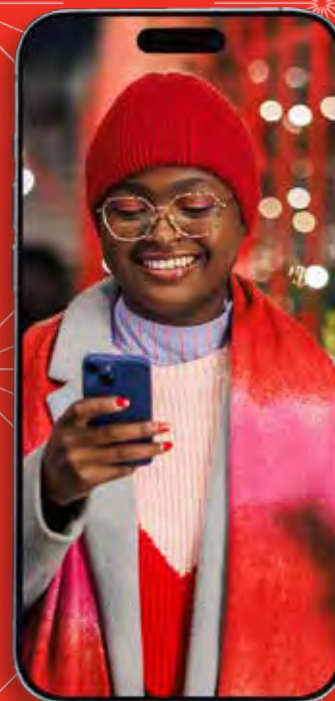
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Shriners Hospital marks 100 years

MATTHEW DALDALIAN
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The Shriners Hospital for Children marked its 100th anniversary with an open-house event that brought families inside treatment areas, activity rooms and research spaces rarely seen by the public.

The pediatric orthopedic hospital, which moved to its current site near the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC) in 2015, now treats patients from across Canada and abroad.



Patient Lucas Paul Gurunlian smiles in the lobby of Shriners Hospital as the hospital celebrates its centennial. (Photo: Matthew Daldalian, Parc-Extension News)

For visitors

Visitors arrived throughout the afternoon for guided tours, demonstrations and children's workshops. Displays highlighted a century of clinical development, including the hospital's role in treating rare bone disorders and in advancing mobility care.

Among those in attendance was nine-year-old Lucas Paul Gurunlian, who receives treatment at the hospital. He spoke about some of the activities that have helped him during long recovery periods. "When I broke my ribs here, they did like special stuff with arts and crafts," he said.

Gurunlian recalled one memory that stood out from his visits. "They would watch a movie with popcorn, and I get to meet Santa Claus [...] but on the TV because it was during COVID," he said.

Staff

Shriners staff positioned the centennial as both a celebration and a statement about the hospital's place in pediatric research.

Acting hospital administrator Kelly Thorstad said the milestone reflects years of development in treatment methods and patient support. She said the open house was meant to highlight "100 years of hope, innovation and healing," and to show families how patient care and research work together.

Thorstad emphasized that advancements made within the hospital have shaped care across the country. She pointed to the creation of treatment protocols for osteogenesis imperfecta as a milestone that established Shriners as a leader in rare bone disease treatment.

The hospital's open house included science demonstrations, activity rooms for children, and presentations from clinical leaders.

Staff said showing families how care is delivered day-to-day helps the hospital build transparency and trust. Information tables guided visitors through physical therapy tools, surgical approaches and child-life support practices.

Nursing leadership also pointed to the role of technology in shaping recovery for young patients. Assistant head nurse Vanessa D'Aquila said access to resources and updated equipment has let staff adapt best-practice guidelines into local care. "There's so many generous donors that provide us with the resources to grasp that new technology and the new way of doing things," she said.

D'Aquila described spinal surgery recovery as one example where interdisciplinary coordination affects patient outcomes.

Mobilization sometimes begins within hours of waking from major procedures. She said seeing patients return after recovery remains a constant reminder of why long-term rehabilitation work matters.

"Seeing how they recover over the days that follow in the hospital, then coming back to visit us, is one of the most rewarding views that we could have," D'Aquila said.

Research teams continue to evaluate virtual-reality distraction tools to manage pain during certain treatments. Staff said the method has reduced reliance on medication in some cases, though use varies depending on procedure and age.

D'Aquila said VR is used in multiple areas of the hospital. It gives patients a way to stay focused on something other than discomfort while remaining engaged with staff when needed.

Significance

Shriners Hospital performed more than 1,500 surgeries last year and continues to treat chil-



Nurse Vanessa D'Aquila stands in a patient room at the Shriners Hospital Montreal facility during its 100th anniversary year. (Photo: Matthew Daldalian, Parc-Extension News)

dren from about 20 countries.

The centennial event aimed to highlight that reach while positioning the hospital as a continuing research hub in Quebec and Canada.

The hospital's leadership noted that the goal now is to maintain progress while holding to the mandate first set a century ago: specialized pediatric orthopedic care for children, regardless of background or financial status.

The anniversary marked a moment of reflection for staff, researchers and families whose lives have intersected with the institution.

For Gurunlian, the milestone is measured through small victories inside treatment rooms and activity halls.



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OPINION & Editorial



Flash: It's Christmas because of Christ

All other claims – secular, commercial, social, or cultural pale in comparison to joy of The Birth and freedom bestowed by The Cross

In this Christmas dream, Christ fills every moment, His radiant presence guiding thoughts, words, and deeds toward love, mercy, and truth. In this imagined-world God's love overflows into every relationship, dissolving fear, resentment, division, war so that families and neighbours can greet one another patiently, in genuine generosity. In it, falsehoods lose their grip as honesty, humility, integrity become everyday companions, even if for just a very special time, creating cultures of trust and mutual respect that strengthen families, communities, and strangers alike.

Within this vision, disease, poverty, and violence are overcome by profound influence of grace and application of justice. Giving becomes natural, each person valued as bearer of dignity and worth. Hearts are healed, friendships repaired, reconciliation shaped, by example of Jesus, who taught and lived in mercy and self-giving. Absence of violence, killing and cruelty arises not from denial of pain but from a renewed capacity to love neighbours as ourselves, guided by the Light richly-described by John the Apostle as true, everlasting, life-giving.

Hope shines through, promise of eternal life grows from faith in Christ. This is not distant theory but living reality that touches the present, inspiring daily routines with purpose, meaning, and hopeful expectancy for what's coming. The season becomes a joyful announcement that sacrificial death of the Risen One, gives way to kindness and prayers as trust placed in God's sovereignty contributes to a future breaking into the present with compassion, mercy, joy, and peace on earth to all good men, women and children.

In this times of a broken world of 2025 A.D., the dream begs for inviting Christ into daily lives. What is there to lose? Begin each day with quiet moments of gratitude, asking for His presence in our intentions and actions. Let small

acts of kindness ripple outward, welcoming outsiders, serving the needy, speaking truth with gentleness, and embracing honesty, even and especially at personal cost.

Sing together in worship, light candles-of-hope, reenact stories of God's faithfulness, letting Christmas become a living reminder that God is with here, loving us completely, promising eternal life to all who trust in Him.

Rejoice in the blessed shared narrative that places Jesus at centre, not as an idea but as presence and light, guiding our earthly journey. To live well is to think with care, speak honestly, and act with empathy toward all. The call is simple: find Christ again, let that encounter shape what's to be done, how to treat others, guiding our days. When love becomes standard and truth service, life gains meaning that outlasts storms throughout all seasons.

The invitation extends beyond personal renewal to shared life of community. Let kindnesses define us, not as performance, but as natural expressions of choosing to walk in God's light. Let integrity be daily-practice, so that what's preached about compassion is visible in patient-listening, fair-dealing, steadfast-support for the vulnerable. Aligning belief with action, inspirational ways of life emerge full-force, tangible, contagious, eternally-precious, perpetually-sacred.

In this Christmas vision, people grow in goodness together. Small acts like listening, helping, encouragement accumulate into larger patterns that honour God, uplifting neighbours. The aim is not perfection but faithful commitment to living by what is professed, inviting others to travel toward life that is meaningful, hopeful, oriented toward goodness.

In our commerce-saturated-age, Christmas becomes surplus rather than a season of meaning, and dare it be said, giving. Yet Christmas essence is timeless: God's gift in Christ, revelation that calls for reordering of desires.

If material abundance crowds out spiritual abundance, then the truest celebration is not found in how much is spent, but in how faithfully lives are loved. The ask is to resist consumerism and return to Christmas-as-daily practice, greeting each morning with gratitude, generosity, renewed commitment to truth and mercy.

To celebrate Christ day-to-day is to cultivate rhythm of small, significant acts, opportunities to meet others' needs, responding with kindness, relieving the overwhelmed, encouraging the discouraged. In hope and doing, Christmas ceases to be the once-a-year pageant, and becomes the guiding principle for living. The miracle, not confined to December 25, unfolds in ordinary moments offered in love, revealing Divine Presence in everyday life.

True joy is built on trust, integrity, and mutual accountability, qualities that contrast hollow displays and empty promises. By prioritizing human dignity and justice, communities embody the light of Christmas long after ornaments are put away. Daily celebrating of silent-night holy-night, sanctifies the gift-of-life, honouring the Christ who gives life-with-purpose, inviting others to shed materialism and embrace love, truth, and kindness.

As the Christmas season fills our homes and hearts with joy, Parc-Extension News extends warmest wishes to readers and community, a time to cherish moments bringing us together, to reaffirm family and friends, looking ahead with hope.

May the spirit of Christmas bring comfort, compassion, and renewed strength to each of you. As we step into a new year, may it be a time of healing, opportunity, and brighter days for our families, neighbours, and the community we share.

Merry Christmas and a healthy, happy, and peaceful New Year to all.

Renata Isopo

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Border Bill C-12 passes the house, Parc-Extension groups warn of real-world impact

DIMITRIS ILIAS
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A sweeping federal bill billed as a border security and immigration system overhaul is now one step closer to becoming law, and community voices in and around Parc-Extension are already sounding the alarm about what it could mean for vulnerable residents.

Bill C-12, titled the Strengthening Canada's Immigration System and Borders Act, was adopted by the House of Commons on December 11, 2025, according to Parliament's official record of the bill at third reading.

The legislation now heads to the Senate for further study and debate.

The federal government's public explanation of the bill frames it as a package meant to disrupt organized crime, strengthen border security, and modernize tools for enforcement while respecting privacy and Charter rights.

The bill itself is omnibus in nature, touching several laws and enforcement areas, including measures related to customs and border integrity.

But in Montreal, advocacy groups have warned that measures presented as security upgrades

can have sharp consequences for migrants and people without secure status, particularly in neighbourhoods like Parc-Extension where many residents are newcomers, international students, and low income workers.

In early December, a community mobilization tied to opposition to Bill C-12 was promoted for a location near Metro Parc, signalling that the issue is not abstract for locals who rely on community networks for support and information.

National advocacy organizations have also published critiques urging senators to reject the bill, arguing it could restrict access to asylum and introduce rules that put people at risk.

The political debate will continue in Ottawa, but for residents on the ground, the practical question is what changes may arrive next, and how quickly.

For Parc-Extension, where immigration status, housing security, and access to services often intersect, community organizations say the priority is ensuring people understand their rights and get reliable legal information early, long before a crisis at the border or a letter in the mailbox.

Bill 2 puts Park Extension's Novomed clinic at risk

A family medicine clinic in Parc-Extension says uncertainty around Quebec's delayed Bill 2 continues to put its future in question

MATTHEW DALDALIAN
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Dr. Jhanzaib Sherwani sitting inside Novomed clinic. (Photo: Matthew Daldalian, Parc-Extension News)

Novomed, a Groupe de Médecine de Famille (GMF) clinic that opened in October 2023, operates up to 76 hours a week and now counts 14 doctors and several specialists, including a dermatologist, neurologist and gynecologist.

Medical director Dr. Jhanzaib Sherwani said proposed changes to physician remuneration under Bill 2 — which was adopted in the fall but has since been postponed until at least Feb. 28 — created deep concern among clinic operators about long-term financial stability.

The issues

The Legault government has since agreed in principle to walk back some of the legislation's most controversial elements.

"Some of the potential consequences are longer wait times to see doctors," Sherwani said. "More difficulty accessing care because clinics will close, less specialized clinics [...] those are all clinics that are being threatened by the law and their future is currently in peril."

Sherwani said Novomed's GMF funding "covers 15.8 per cent of our operating costs," while doctors' overhead contributions account for 52.4 per cent, with the remaining 31.7 per

▶ Continued on page 7



A family inside Novomed clinic in Parc-Extension. (Photo: Matthew Daldalian, Parc-Extension News)

◀ Continued from page 6

cent coming directly out of his own pocket.

The medical director said the clinic entered the year already carrying a substantial deficit, and that early projections tied to the original version of Bill 2 showed how vulnerable clinics like Novomed could be.

A simulation he ran indicated his compensation would drop by more than half; a reduction he said would dramatically worsen the clinic's finances. "If that in fact does happen, then we're looking at a deficit of \$650,000 next year," he said, describing the scenario clinics feared before the government agreed to remove performance penalties and delay implementation.

Uncertainty

Québec solidaire MNA Andrés Fontecilla, who represents Laurier-Dorion, said the uncertainty created by Bill 2 has already had consequences in neighbourhoods like Parc-Extension, where access to primary care has historically been limited.

"Bill 2 will severely jeopardize the financial health of this clinic," Fontecilla said. "If the effects of Bill 2 materialize, the clinic could close once again. This will be a disaster for the residents of Parc-Extension."

Fontecilla said he has pushed for more permits for doctors in the neighbourhood since 2020, noting that before Novomed opened, residents relied largely on the local CLSC and a single small clinic.

He described the area's medical landscape at the time as extremely fragile and called Novomed "essential to our community," warning that losing it would undo years of progress.

Breaking barriers

"A lot of people in Parc-Ex, their first language isn't English and French," said community advocate and owner of restaurant Mama Khan Abdul Razik Khan. "The language barrier and the access to the clinics is very, very hard."

Khan said those concerns reflect long-standing challenges in the neighbourhood, particularly for residents facing language and cultural barriers.

Khan noted that Novomed stands out because patients can communicate with staff who speak their language and understand their cultural context. "[Novomed] was one of the clinics that actually had different languages spoken and able to get in different services," he said.

Both Sherwani and Khan said they remain worried that even with the government's recent concessions, the broader direction of reform could push clinics toward faster, more transactional care. Khan said a doctor who visits his restaurant warned that early versions of the bill emphasized strict quotas. "They're also going to have a quota to say every patient has to be seen in less than seven minutes," he said. "It becomes more like a car wash. You're in and out."

Sherwani said he will "try everything possible to make this clinic viable and not close," but urged residents to stay engaged as negotiations continue. He pointed to a petition before the National Assembly as one way for patients to weigh in. "[People] should be aware that this is their way to, to fight this and to fight for their care," he said.

If Novomed were ever forced to shut its doors, Sherwani said the local CLSC would likely be the only remaining option. "I would think that that's probably going to be the only beacon of hope in this neighbourhood," he said.



Novomed clinic in Parc-Extension. (Photo: Matthew Daldalian, Parc-Extension News)

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★ Merry Christmas ★

Holiday travel: stay alert behind the wheel

Do you have a few Christmas or New Year's parties to attend this year? Will you be driving yourself—and possibly others—late at night? To ensure your festivities don't turn into a tragedy, make it a priority to keep yourself and those around you safe by never getting behind the wheel after consuming alcohol or drugs.

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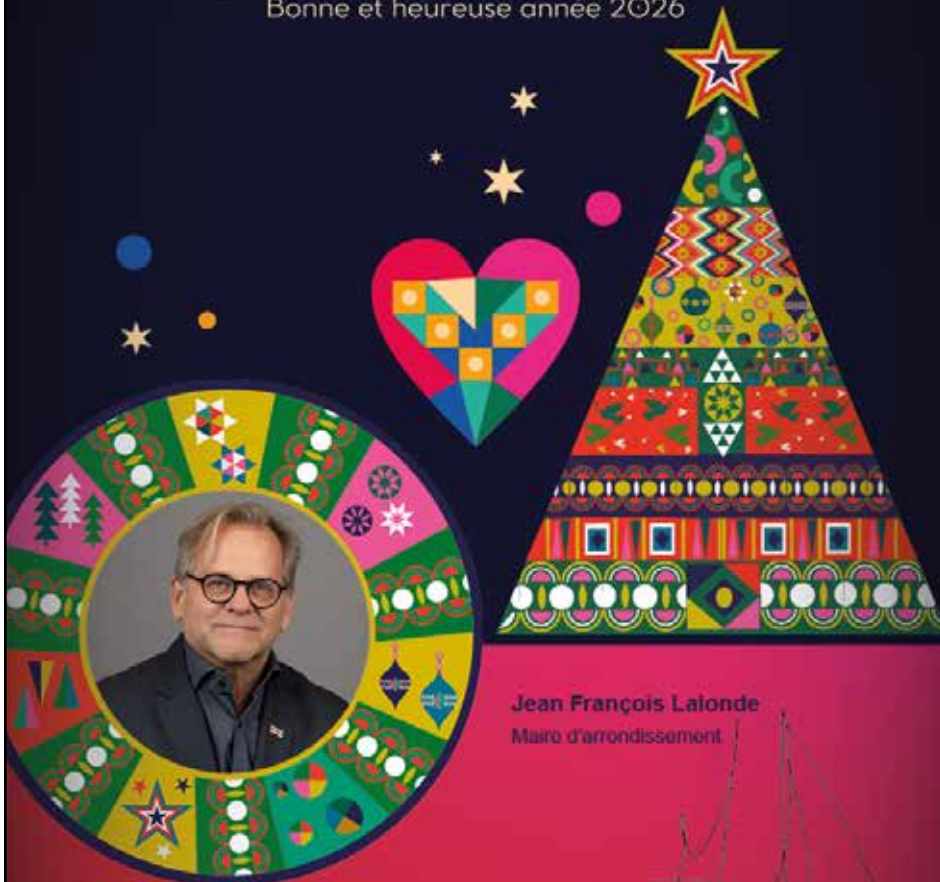
situations with some simple strategies. If possible, consider staying overnight. If that's not an option, plan your return trip with a designated driver, a taxi, a ride-share service, or public transit.



Remember, even small amounts of alcohol can impair your judgment. In other words, just because you feel fine doesn't mean you're fit to drive. Although provincial laws permit a maximum blood alcohol concentration (BAC) somewhere in the range of 0.05 to 0.08 per cent (50 to 80 milligrams of alcohol per 100 millilitres of blood), this doesn't guarantee your safety behind the wheel.

Don't contribute to accident statistics linked to alcohol or drug use while driving. Before you hit the road this holiday season, ensure you're completely fit to drive. Stay safe and enjoy the festivities!

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Bonne et heureuse année 2026



Jean François Lalonde
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★ Merry Christmas ★

Shopping for gifts online? Avoid these common mistakes!



Doing your holiday shopping online definitely has its advantages. It helps you escape those crowded malls and avoid driving in snowy conditions. If the online option appeals to you, make sure to avoid these pitfalls.

DON'T WAIT UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE

Online shopping and procrastination don't mix well during the holidays. Start your search early to ensure your gifts arrive on time. Check estimated delivery dates and, ideally, give yourself some extra time in case of delays. If you're running behind, be prepared to pay for express shipping.

READ PRODUCT DESCRIPTIONS CAREFULLY

Pay attention to dimensions, materials, sizes, language and other important details specific to the product you're buying to avoid disappointment. Whether it's furniture, clothing or electronics, vague descriptions may be a sign that the website isn't legitimate, so be cautious.

DON'T BLINDLY TRUST AN UNKNOWN WEBSITE

Use secure and reliable websites that provide thorough information, including full contact details and clear exchange and refund policies. Do the prices seem too good to be true? Are there exorbitant extra fees? Is the site cluttered with broken links and buttons? If so, it's best to click away. Stick to websites you're familiar with, especially those of local retailers.

DON'T NEGLECT TO READ THE RETURN POLICY

Before making a purchase, take the time to understand the return policy. Ask yourself: can you get a refund, or is it an exchange-only situation? How long is the return period? Is the product a final sale? Do your homework to avoid any unpleasant surprises.

Happy online shopping!

Creative hobbies: 7 gift ideas to entertain young and old alike

Creative hobbies are the perfect way to express yourself, relax and develop your fine motor skills. Spoil the artists in your life, regardless of their age, with these inspiring gift ideas.

1. **Paint-by-number or diamond painting kit.** These fun kits enable anyone to create beautiful art depicting many different subjects, including animals, landscapes and more.
2. **Candle-making kit.** A wide variety of these kits is available, containing everything you need to start making

candles in different shapes and sizes.

3. **Craft kit.** Packed with assorted craft supplies like googly eyes, feathers, pompoms and glitter, these kits are sure to delight budding artists.
4. **Art case.** This handy case contains a selection of art supplies, including pencils, markers, pastels and watercolours. It's perfect for both young and seasoned artists alike.
5. **Light-up board.** An excellent tool for tracing, a light-up

board makes it easy to copy a variety of patterns and designs. It's often included with kids' tablets.

6. **Crochet or embroidery kit.** If someone you love has recently taken up needlework, they're sure to be thrilled to add a new kit like this to their crafting collection.
7. **Origami kit.** This kit comes with beautiful paper and instructions to create various origami folds. It's a perfect choice for those who enjoy working with their hands.

Visit your local shops today and give the gift of creativity!

À toutes les citoyennes et tous les citoyens que j'ai l'honneur de représenter, à tous les groupes, organismes communautaires et commerces avec lesquels j'ai le plaisir de collaborer ainsi qu'à toutes les Québécoises et tous les Québécois de tous les horizons, **je vous souhaite de joyeuses fêtes!**

To all the citizens that I have the honour to represent, to all the groups, community organizations and businesses with which I have the pleasure to collaborate as well as to all Quebecers of all horizons, I wish you happy holidays!

– **Andrés Fontecilla**
Député de Laurier-Dorion



Joyeux Noël et Bonne Année!
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Proanima prepares to take over animal shelter services in Montreal

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Starting Jan. 1, 2026, Proanima will become the organization responsible for managing animal services across all 19 boroughs of Montreal.

The new centre, located in Villeray–Saint-Michel–Parc-Extension, is part of a 10-year, \$158-million agreement awarded by the City of Montreal in 2023.

The deal

Under the deal, Proanima will become the sole organization responsible for animal services across all 19 boroughs, replacing a model that relied heavily on the SPCA of Montreal and borough-level arrangements.

Dr. Vincent Paradis, Proanima’s director of shelter medicine, said the organization is nearing operational readiness after years of planning.

“The building is ready, the staff are ready, and we’re really looking forward to starting to offer services on the island,” Paradis said in an interview with Parc-Extension News.

Montreal’s animal services framework has evolved over time, shifting between municipal oversight and contracted organizations.

For decades, the SPCA of Montreal handled the bulk of sheltering responsibilities for the city under municipal contracts. Responsibilities included caring for abandoned and stray animals while also conducting inspections and cruelty investigations.

Under the new framework, the SPCA will step back from shelter operations and focus

on their advocacy, inspections and specialized animal care, while continuing to collaborate with Proanima on certain exceptional cases.

City officials previously said the centralized model is intended to harmonize services across boroughs as well as to improve capacity.

Proanima and Montreal

Proanima itself currently delivers animal services in 14 cities and municipalities on Montreal’s South Shore and in the Montérégie.

According to figures provided by the organization, it has admitted approximately 60,000 animals since 2012 and operates facilities that combine sheltering, veterinary care, adoption services and public education.

Nearly half of Montreal households have at least one pet, and shelter admissions rose sharply during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Paradis said a key difference in Proanima’s approach is its emphasis on prevention rather than relying solely on physical shelter intake.

“Proanima is not just offering a physical sheltering environment for animals,” he said. “A lot of what we do is preventive services to reduce the number of animals that need to be taken into a shelter.”

Those services include sterilization programs for community cats, as well as low-cost surgeries for residents in financial difficulty.

A surrender-prevention program will also be available, designed to keep animals with their owners whenever possible. The goal, Paradis said, is to intervene earlier and divert animals away from shelter intake when safe alternatives exist.



Pie-IX location

At the same time, the Pie-IX facility has been designed to accommodate the volume of animals Montreal has seen over the past decade.

“The infrastructure was planned to respond to the volume of animals observed in Montreal over the last ten years,” Paradis said, adding that intake trends were a central consideration in the building’s design.

The decision to locate the first centre in Villeray–Saint-Michel–Parc-Extension was driven by a combination of logistical considerations and long-term planning. Paradis said suitable sites for animal facilities are rare on the island due to density and zoning constraints.

“Having a building and land that meet animals’ needs is very specific, and on the island of Montreal that’s not common,” he said. He added that proximity to residents is also a long-term priority, with plans to eventually expand coverage to the southwest of the island through a second facility.

Proanima’s relationship with Montreal is not

entirely new. Paradis noted the organization has worked with the city for several years providing logistical support during dangerous-dog interventions, describing the current transition as an evolution rather than a sudden change.

A new point of contact

As the new system comes online, Proanima will also act as the city’s primary point of contact for animal services. Paradis said a centralized phone line will be available to residents starting Jan. 3, allowing Montrealers to receive guidance or request assistance through a single access point.

The change to centralized animal services has been more than a decade in the making. Montreal first floated the idea of a city-run or centralized shelter in 2011, with subsequent proposals stalled by funding and political hurdles. The current contract represents the most significant overhaul of animal services governance from the city.

The new system is scheduled to take effect when the Pie-IX centre opens in early 2026.

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Repossessions and “reprise de logement” pressures return to Parc-Extension, tenants’ groups push back



DIMITRIS ILIAS
dimitri@newsfirst.ca

As winter settles in, tenant advocates in Parc-Extension are warning that a more silent seasonal pressure is also returning: the spike in

“reprise de logement” claims, landlord moves to repossess units, that tenants’ groups say are too often used to displace vulnerable residents in a tight rental market.

In recent days, Montreal Media highlighted the issue publicly, noting concerns that bad-faith repossessions are growing in Parc-Extension and that the neighbourhood’s low income and immigrant population is particularly exposed.

Local advocacy groups have circulated messages pointing to the scale of the problem and urging tenants to seek advice quickly and document everything. Social posts tied to Parc-Extension housing advocacy referenced figures linked to households seeking help after losing housing due to repossession, and framed the

trend as part of a wider pattern of displacement pressure.

While the legal details vary case by case, tenant organizers stress a consistent point: tenants should not wait until the last minute to understand timelines, notices, and available remedies. Workshops and information sessions have been promoted in Montreal in mid-December specifically on the topic of repossession, reflecting how common the issue has become.

The City of Montreal also points residents toward support pathways for low income tenants who cannot secure housing, including contacting 311 for potential referral to services associated with the OMHM’s housing support mechanisms.

In Park- Extension, these pressures land differently than in many parts of the city. The neighbourhood’s density means a single repossession can ripple outward: overcrowding in a relative’s apartment, kids changing schools mid-year, and families pushed farther from transit and community networks.

Tenant advocates say the most effective protection is knowledge early on, reading notices carefully, seeking credible legal information, and connecting with reputable local organizations before a dispute becomes irreversible. As the market stays tight and rents remain a dominant worry citywide, Parc-Extension’s housing story is, once again, a frontline version of Montreal’s larger crisis.

Grocery prices keep climbing in Montreal

Park-Extension families feel the squeeze first

DIMITRIS ILIAS
dimitri@newsfirst.ca

As grocery prices continue to rise across Canada, residents of Park-Extension are feeling the impact more acutely than most, according to food security advocates and recent reporting from Montreal-based media.

Statistics Canada’s latest food price index, published within the last week, confirms that grocery inflation remains stubbornly high, particularly for staple items such as fresh produce, dairy products, bread, and cooking oils. While the pace of increases has slowed compared to earlier peaks, prices remain significantly higher than they were two years ago, putting sustained pressure on low-income households.

In Park-Extension, where many families already spend a larger share of their income on food, the effects are immediate. Community organizations operating food banks and collective kitchens in the neighbourhood report increased demand heading into winter, with more first-time users seeking assistance.

Montreal media outlets including have reported that food insecurity is now affecting a growing number of working households, not only those traditionally considered at risk. Rising rents, combined with higher grocery

bills, are leaving families with fewer choices at the checkout counter.

Park-Extension is particularly exposed to these trends. The neighbourhood has one of Montreal’s highest concentrations of recent immigrants and large households, many of whom rely on affordable grocery stores and small independent markets. When prices rise across the board, the ability to substitute or shop around becomes limited.

Local food justice advocates point out that inflation affects not only how much people pay, but what they buy. Families increasingly report cutting back on fresh fruits, vegetables, and protein, opting instead for cheaper, less nutritious options. Health workers warn this shift can have long-term consequences, particularly for children.

In response, some community groups are expanding food distribution programs and advocating for broader policy measures, including enhanced social assistance indexing and support for affordable food access in dense urban neighbourhoods.

While grocery inflation is a national issue, its local impact is uneven. In Park-Extension, where budgets are already stretched thin, rising food prices are not an abstract economic indicator but a daily calculation made aisle by aisle.



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Not So Merry: Canadians feeling the most financial pressure anticipate little relief next year

Majority of lower-income households say it's difficult to put food on the table

ANGUS REID INSTITUTE

Trees all around the country are being lit and the holiday rush is upon us. But new data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds the festive feeling likely a touch brighter for some than others.

Much like Santa in a snowstorm, many Canadians are facing a high level of pressure this Christmas. One-in-five score as a "high" on ARI's Financial Pressure Index, which measures their economic reality and outlook on eight different variables. This group is defined by higher levels of job insecurity, difficulty putting food on the table, higher debt levels, and a generally pessimistic outlook on their finances. Troublingly, three-in-five among this worst-off group say they expect worse in 2026. Another one-in-five Canadians (19%) face medium pressure, highlighted by some of the same challenges as the "high" group, but fewer of them compounding on top of the others.

On the other end of the spectrum, those with "very low" financial pressure – 23 per cent of Canadians – expect either more of the same (51%) or improvement (42%) over the next year.

The largest group (37%) are those facing a low level of pressure. They have stable working lives, relatively stable outlooks for the coming year, and manageable (though not easy) housing payments – whether renting or paying a mortgage.

In a year full of tariff turmoil and economic anxiety, the cost of living continues to dominate the minds of Canadians heading into 2026. Three-in-five (59%) choose this as their top issue, well ahead of health care (41%), housing affordability (26%) and the economy (23%). With big plans announced by provincial and federal governments, including "major projects" and investments in housing, Canadians will be keen to see results that impact their own lives sooner than later.

Part One: Cost of living and 'financial pressure'

Top issues centre on cost-of-living

Canada's inflation has slowed its pace considerably over the past two years compared to the highs of 2022 and 2023. In November, Statistics Canada's headline inflation was 2.2 per cent year-on-year. Despite the pace of price acceleration slowing, Canadians are evidently still feeling the pinch of a high cost of living. Three-in-five (59%) select it as the top issue facing Canada, a proportion that has changed little even as inflation has slowed.

The price of food remains an area of key concern for both Canadians and policy makers. Even in a slowing inflation environment, the price of groceries has increased at a pace faster than overall inflation for nine consecutive months. The expectation is that Canadians won't get relief

on that front in 2026. A new report estimates food prices in the country will rise by four to six per cent, representing a near-\$1,000 increase for a typical family of four. This suggests that concerns about the high cost of living may not be fading any time soon.

Meanwhile, one-quarter of Canadians worry over housing affordability (26%) and the economy (23%) more generally. The latter has become perhaps a greater focus after 12 months of economic upheaval caused by U.S. President Donald Trump and his tariffs. For now, although the U.S. has made plenty of noise about tariffs, 85 per cent of Canada's trade with the U.S. is a tariff free because of the Canada-U.S.-Mexico Agreement. That free trade pact is set to be reviewed trilaterally in the new year.

Across the country, concern over the high cost of living is shared, while there is less agreement on how pressing housing affordability is depending on the province.

Financial Pressure Index

Economic realities vary widely in Canada depending on a number of variables, from job security to housing affordability, to one's own outlook on their financial health. To gauge these views, ARI created a Financial Pressure Index, which scores respondents on eight questions and sorts them into one of four groups based on the intensity of the financial pressure they face.

One of the key items on this index is how secure a person's job feels. Among those with high pressure, only 10 per cent feel totally secure, while more than two-in-five feel insecure. For those with very low pressure, this simply isn't a factor in their life.

The same can be said of one's own household finances. Each group has a different level of security that they self-profess, with that group of one-in-five high pressure individuals near unanimous in the belief that their finances are poor or very poor.

There is no group for which financial pressure is inescapable, but there are clear correlating factors. The starkest of which is household income level. For other demographics that play a role, including age, (viewed detailed tables).

Top issues for those facing higher levels of financial pressure tend to skew toward financial concerns like the cost of living, housing affordability, and jobs/unemployment.

Part Two: Assessments of this year and hope for the next

One-third say they are 'worse off' than last year

Angus Reid Institute has been tracking the economic perceptions of Canadians for more than a decade now. 2025 saw fewer Canadians saying

they are worse off now than they were a year ago compared to 2024, but still a considerable portion (36%) holding this view. The largest group (47%) say they are in about the same place financially now as they were heading into last Christmas, while the smallest group (15%) are better off.

This ratio of better-same-worse holds relatively similarly across the country, though it is worth noting that the proportion of those saying they are worse off now is highest in New Brunswick at 47 per cent and lowest in Quebec at 31 per cent.

One-quarter expect to be financially worse off next year

After a year of economic turmoil, it is perhaps a small victory for Canadians that the proportion of those who say they will be worse off next year is back to the level it was during December 2024. This, after a five-point jump over the summer. One-in-five say they will be better off and 45 per cent expect no change.

The hope for upward mobility eludes many of the worst off in Canada. Among those with high financial pressure currently, three-in-five (59%) say they expect it to be worse next year. Those with medium pressure are equally likely to say they'll be worse off (34%) or about the same (36%) but few say their situation will improve (17%).

Part Three: Core economic indicators

Majority of low-income households say it's 'difficult' to put food on the table

The challenges of grocery inflation are not a concern to three-in-five Canadians (58%) who say it is 'easy' to feed their household. However, that picture changes dramatically depending on the respondents' household income. For those in the lowest income bracket, one-quarter (24%) say feeding their household is very difficult and more than a third (37%) describe it as just 'difficult'.

Food Bank Canada's Hunger in Canada report noted that there were 2.2 million food bank visits in March 2025, double the number there were in March 2019. With higher grocery prices expected in 2026, putting food on the table will continue to be an expensive proposition for many Canadians.

Debt a source of stress for three-in-five

The holiday season can be difficult for Canadians' wallets, with gifts and holiday parties on the docket. At the same time, household debt continues to be a persistent issue for Canadians, who collectively hold \$1.75 worth of it for every \$1 of income. Canadians' household debt relative to their income is the highest in the G7. It also continues to rise. In November, during Black Friday sales, the use of the "buy now pay later" option doubled from last year.

The percentage of Canadians who say they are

stressed about their debt levels has been relatively stable since 2022. Three-in-five (60%) describe their debt as either a minor (38%) or major (22%) source of stress. For one-quarter (23%), they have debt but it's not a problem, while one-in-five (17%) say they don't have any debt.

Debt levels vary by province. Alberta and Newfoundland and Labrador are consistently the two provinces at the highest levels when it comes to consumer debt per household. Three-in-ten (30%) in Alberta describe their debt as a major source of stress, the most in the country, followed by those in Canada's easternmost province (25%). One-quarter (24%) in Ontario also report high levels of stress from their debt.

Improving situations for renters and mortgage holders?

Although there remain lingering concerns over housing affordability in Canada, there has been improvements for renters in recent years. Rents fell year-over-year in December and the average rent in the country is now at the lowest level since June 2023. Some have pointed to Canada restricting the number of international student visas as one potential explanation for plummeting rent. There has also been a high number of purpose-built rentals coming into the market in Canada's biggest cities.

In June 2023, one-quarter (24%) of renters said they found the cost of rent "very difficult" to accommodate. That has declined nine points, as half of renters (53%) now say they find their rent easy or manageable.

Mortgage holders too are facing a more friendly market in recent years as the Bank of Canada instituted a series of rate cuts. Interest rates were at their highest from July 2023 to May 2024. Since then, the BoC has cut its policy rate from five per cent to 2.25 per cent. But the days of rates cuts may be behind the BoC, as recent economic data has given the Bank plenty of reason to change tact.

Interest rates have improved for mortgage holders compared to 2023 and 2024 but are still above those seen during 2021 and early 2022. That matters because Canadian mortgages renew every five years, and those who locked into five-year fixed mortgages at the interest rate lows of the pandemic lending era now face renewal. These data will be a key economic indicator to watch next year as mortgage holders renew their pandemic-era loans.

For now, three-in-five (62%) of homeowners with mortgage describe the cost as easy (10%) or manageable (52%); two-in-five (38%) report more challenges.

In June 2024, when interest rates were still near the peak, one-in-six (16%) mortgage holders described their payment as "very difficult" to handle. That figure has since halved (7%).



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FROM WAYNE & TAMARA

THE MENU

Q My husband and I are working on 12 years of marriage. We have relocated several times for jobs, but are finally settled down (we hope!). My mother-in-law says we are keeping her grandchildren from her by taking this job and moving where we are. We live nine hours away from his parents, which is closer than we've been in years.

Last year because we were unemployed we went to their house for Christmas. This year, now that things are financially mended, we are hosting the Christmas shindigs. The family will be here Christmas Eve and Christmas night, and I planned on taking care of everything as hostess.

My mother-in-law told me she is bringing Christmas dinner. Then a couple of days later she said she is going to bring the meal for Christmas Eve as well. Now, I am in no way incapacitated, ill, unable, or unwilling to cook. I had reserved a prime rib and a ham and planned on all the fixings to go with them. Now both will go unused, so she can bring lasagna and a small pork loin roll.

That's not enough to feed everyone. My husband says let her, but I don't feel it's right. As a hostess I feel insulted. As a daughter-in-law I feel encroached upon. I don't want to set a precedent for future holidays or visits. I also don't want to offend her. Is she being helpful or overbearing? And how do I tactfully discuss this with her so as not to make matters worse?

Sara

A Sara, in your own home you never give in. Because if your home is not your haven, your castle, and your refuge, then you are homeless. You are right about setting a precedent you cannot live with. In a situation like this the hostess tells the guests—whether they be family or friends—what will be served and when. If someone wishes to bring another dish, it can be placed as a side dish to the main fare the host and hostess provide.

Your mother-in-law can rule the roost in her own home, but she doesn't get to rule the roost in yours. As in dealing with children, be firm, fair, and consistent. Simply state what the meals and mealtimes are to be. That is your absolute right as a hostess.

Wayne & Tamara

WILLOW IN THE WIND

Q Two years ago I met the love of my life. He is sweet as can be. We love each other's families, share secrets, and laugh until our stomachs hurt. We have an amazing sexual, emotional, and spiritual connection. I feel as if I'm looking into my own eyes when I look into his. I care for him like I would my child.

But something has gone terribly wrong. His best friend just moved across the street, and this friend has a younger brother who lives with him. They make my fiancé a different person. He makes rude comments to me in front of them for entertainment, and ditches our plans to hang out with them. They want to start a rock band together, something my fiancé said he would never waste his time on. Now he is considering it. I dropped friends for him, but he refuses to drop these men--excuse me,

boys--for me.

Frances

A Frances, we get letters from women who are angry when another woman mimics their dress, hairstyle, or interests. Because your fiancé is the opposite sex you don't see a connection to that behavior. When with his friends, your fiancé mimics their behavior; with you, he mimics you. He doesn't wear your same dress, but he takes on your opinions and outlook.

If it is his nature to be malleable, this can happen with anyone. Ask yourself if your communion with him is genuine, or only present when you have sole custody of your "child."

Wayne & Tamara

WAYNE & TAMARA MITCHELL are the authors of YOUR OTHER HALF (www.yourotherhalf.com)

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- Carrots (2lbs)
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The luckiest signs this week:
PISCES, ARIES AND TAURUS



ARIES

Take care not to procrastinate with your work or holiday planning this week. Instead, take time to relax and make the most of the season, keeping in mind that you don't have to aim for perfection.



TAURUS

Organize a gift exchange with your colleagues to bring some festive cheer. You'll be pleasantly surprised to find that everyone in your family has accepted your Christmas invitation. You'll have a fuller house than you were expecting!



GEMINI

Prepare for a demanding week at work this week. Your boss will pile on responsibilities just before the holidays. Some colleagues who were meant to help you may be absent, so stay focused.



CANCER

If you take the time to resolve any issues that are weighing on your mind, you'll be better able to enjoy your holidays to the fullest. By dedicating time to your romantic relationship, you'll strengthen your bond.



LEO

Your boss will assign you new responsibilities, accompanied by a raise, which could be viewed as a promotion. Your success lies in taking risks and exploring the unknown.



VIRGO

If you're single, you may meet someone special as the holidays approach. You may be able to settle some family arguments with the help of your charm and your ability to get along with others, which will make this time of year more peaceful.



LIBRA

Prepare for last-minute changes to your party plans. The festivities will now be hosted at your home. This means you'll have to handle all the preparations. You'll also need to be tactful with certain family members.



SCORPIO

You'll be in the spotlight in one way or another this week. On the job, your hard work will be rewarded with well-deserved recognition. In your love life, this is the perfect time to propose to that special someone.



SAGITTARIUS

Despite wanting to stick to a budget, your generosity may get the better of you and you'll end up buying gifts for everyone. An unexpected expense will arise, but you'll balance it out by taking on extra work.



CAPRICORN

You'll brighten everyone's day and put smiles on their faces this week. However, be careful if you plan to travel. You might even consider treating yourself to a new car as a Christmas gift.



AQUARIUS

As the year comes to a close, you may start to feel fatigued. Focus on maintaining a healthy diet to regain your energy and vitality. This will help you enjoy your holidays to the fullest.



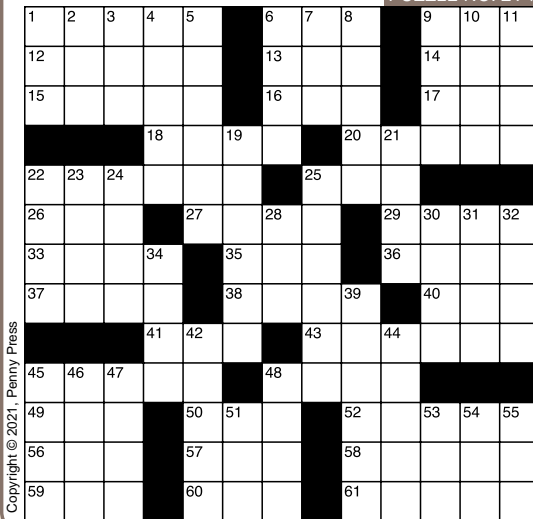
PISCES

You may suggest a magical holiday destination for a family Christmas trip. To be sure everyone can be together for an unforgettable holiday, don't delay on booking flights and accommodations.

Coffee Break

CROSSWORDS

PUZZLE NO. 294



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ACROSS

- Hot chocolate
- Green veggie
- Catch
- Adjust
- "_____ That Jazz"
- Tavern order
- Flat hat
- Snow runner
- Mother's boy
- Take a break
- Was sore
- Monkey's fruit
- Fire residue
- "Look _____ ye leap"
- Record
- Adrift
- Big cat
- Young louse
- Fishing poles
- Narrow road
- Genuine
- Quick taste
- TV commercials

DOWN

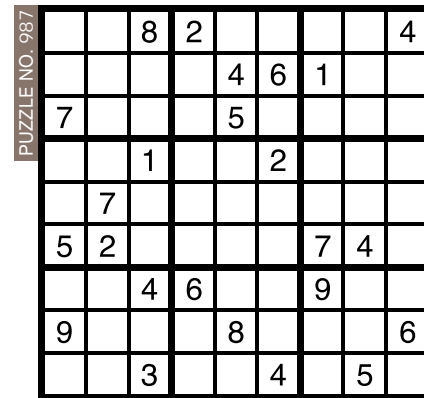
- Scarves
- Grind harshly
- Female singer
- Veto
- Verve
- Host
- Devoured
- Raw mineral
- "_____ and Ivory"
- Get married
- Roofing liquid
- Bullwinkle, e.g.
- Burn reliever
- Road curve
- Holy people
- Blacken with flame
- Church ringer
- Vocal solo
- Sign gas
- Authentic
- Lancelot's title
- Average: hyph.
- Cut, as film
- Poisonous serpents
- Nifty
- Regard highly
- Bus station
- Jazz group
- Chew on
- Ceremony
- Chopped
- Rich Little, e.g.
- Age
- Talk amorously
- Print measures
- Tiger's-_____

Sudoku

HOW TO PLAY:

Fill in the grid so that every row, every column, and every 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9 only once.

Each 3x3 box is outlined with a darker line. You already have a few numbers to get you started. Remember: You must not repeat the numbers 1 through 9 in the same line, column, or 3x3 box.

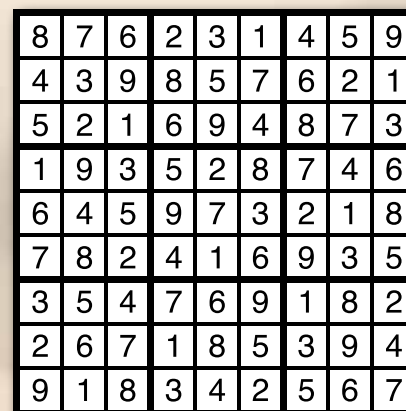


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